

Vision Grants

The Spencer Foundation invests in research to improve education, broadly conceived. We have identified a critical need for innovative, methodologically and disciplinarily diverse, large-scale research projects to transform education systems for equity. Importantly, we believe that ambitious research must begin with the challenges, problems, and opportunities in education systems. To stimulate research that addresses this need, the Spencer Foundation is investing in a new program designed to provide scholars with the time, space, resources, and support to plan a large-scale study or program of research: geared toward real-world impact on equity; based on research across disciplines and methods; reliant on meaningful collaboration with practitioners, policymakers, and communities; and focused on transforming educational systems.

Toward this end, the Vision Grants program funds the collaborative planning of innovative, methodologically diverse, interdisciplinary research on education that contributes to transforming education systems for equity. Vision Grants are research planning grants to bring together a team, for 6 to 12 months, to collaboratively develop ambitious, large-scale research projects focused on transforming educational systems toward greater equity. This program takes as core that visionary, interdisciplinary, and collaborative research projects require time, space, and thoughtfulness to incubate and plan. Vision Grants are \$75,000 total and two cycles of this grant program will be held annually. Different from many of our other programs, the proposal does not yet need to be a fully fleshed out research plan. Proposals are identifying a research topic, scope for impact, process and a team that will lead to a fully fleshed out research plan by the end of the grant period.

While the Vision Grant program stands on its own to spark research ideas and collaborations, being awarded a Vision Grant is also a prerequisite for applying to our Transformative Research Grant program (TRG, \$3.5 million), which are designed for large-scale research projects that transform education systems for equity.

Program Statement

The Vision Grants program is designed to support the field in producing research that disrupts long-standing inequities toward more just and equitable systems. While we are in a time of major challenges in education, we are also in a moment of possibility. We believe that visionary and cross-disciplinary/multi-method scholarship, conducted in generative collaboration with stakeholders in the field, including policy-makers, practitioners, and communities, can contribute to reimagining and transforming educational systems toward equity.

Vision Grants will provide planning funds for teams to develop proposals for research projects that:

- Are focused on key challenges and opportunities that have the potential for increasing equity in education
- Engage across disciplines and/or research methods
- Collaborate with practitioners, policymakers, and communities (and other stakeholders)
- Have clear sightlines to transformational change through research at a systemic level

We imagine that research projects developed with these planning grants will consist of a range of project types. We expect that these grants will go far beyond solely documenting inequality, to instead make significant movement toward policy, practice, or pedagogical change in a way that transforms an education system or systems. We also expect that a range of disciplinary perspectives would be thoughtfully employed, and that these research projects will require multiple methods. Ideal projects will engage across disciplinary traditions or methods, rather than utilizing one disciplinary perspective or lens and/or one methodological tradition.

The Vision Grants allow teams to join together and generate ideas for collaborative scholarship that develops a new vision of what equitable educational systems can look like, consider which disciplines have taken up these issues previously (and why they have fallen short or encountered limitations), and foreground important ideas that will allow new and ambitious research to emerge. For example, Vision Grants might lead to research projects that:

- Develop a new policy, pedagogical approach, practice, or intervention, e.g., at the K-12 or post-secondary level, that has the potential to have a transformative and systemic impact and explore the feasibility of implementing it at the state or local level, or within a system.
- Build upon approaches or policies that have worked well in one setting, with the goal of studying them in a range of settings to better understand how, where, and with whom they work and why.
- Work in partnership with youth at the city, state or federal level to reimagine the choices young people have to learn beyond school.
- Work with communities to co-design approaches that improve educational equity by working across sectors (e.g., education and health, housing, criminal justice).
- Connect scholars with legal teams to impact litigation strategies in local, state, or federal contexts of educational inequity.
- Rethink effective approaches to teacher and educational leader preparation, learning, and development, and partner with systems of teacher and leader preparation and/or accreditation to enact changes that would increase the diversity and robustness of the educator and leader pathways.

These are just examples. We welcome proposals that consider creative ways to understand and solve complex problems with the goal of reimagining and transforming education systems for equity.

Supports for Vision Grant Cohort Program

Once we make funding decisions, we will bring together cohorts of Vision grantees to learn from each other, and to participate in learning opportunities that will further support Vision Grant teams' collaborative planning and project development. Learning opportunities include support for how to do research for impact, and how to partner in equitable and generative ways with stakeholders outside of the academy, or other topics identified by grantees. We will bring together cohorts both in-person and virtually.

Eligibility and Restrictions

Eligibility

Proposals to the Vision Grant program must be for developing research projects that study education and/or learning, broadly conceived, though they can include other sectors in addition to education. Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs applying for a Vision Grant must have appropriate experience or an earned doctorate in an academic discipline or terminal degree in a professional field. While graduate students may be part of the research team, they may not be named the PI or Co-PI on the proposal.

The PI must be affiliated with a non-profit organization or public/governmental institution that is willing to serve as the administering organization if the grant is awarded. The Spencer Foundation does not award grants directly to individuals. Examples include non-profit private or public colleges, universities, school districts, and research facilities, as well as other non-profit organizations with a 501(c)(3) determination from the IRS (or equivalent non-profit status if the organization is outside of the United States).

PIs and Co-PIs may apply for a Vision Grant if they have another active research grant from the Spencer Foundation or if they have another Spencer grant proposal in review.

Proposals are accepted from the U.S. and internationally. All proposals must be submitted in English and budgets must be proposed in U.S. Dollars.

Note: All awarded Vision Grantees will have the option to apply for a Transformative Research Grant, with awards to carry out the planned research project (budgets up to \$3.5M). In addition to considering the development of a proposal for the Transformative Research Grant program, Vision Grant Awardees are also eligible to submit a proposal to other Spencer Foundation grant programs or may choose to submit a proposal to another funding agency.

Restrictions

Proposed budgets for this program are limited to \$75,000 total and may not include indirect cost charges per Spencer's [policy](#).

The Vision Grant may not be longer than 12 months in duration.

How to Apply

Step 1: Submit an Intent to Apply Form

The Intent to Apply is not more than 200 words and has no impact on proposal review. It is a mechanism to assist Spencer's internal planning and program management. The Intent to Apply is required to submit a proposal to the Vision Grants program.

Intent to Apply Guidelines

The Intent to Apply must be submitted through an online application form following the guidelines below before you are given access to the full proposal application. The steps for registering and/or updating SmartSimple profiles and then submitting an Intent to Apply form are as follows:

Registration and My Profile

This application is configured for the Principal Investigator (PI) on the project to register and submit the form. If someone other than the PI will be completing the online application (e.g., an administrative assistant), the PI should register as described below, then provide their username and password to the person assisting them with the application.

If the PI has never accessed the Spencer Foundation online portal, they must register and create a profile by going to <https://spencer.smartsimple.us> and clicking the "Register Here" button. Profiles can be created by following the guidelines on the registration page.

If the PI already has an account, they should log in to update their profile and access the application. Whether creating a new profile or updating an existing one, we request that the PI responds to the variety of questions related to how they identify, as well as their topical and methodological expertise.

After logging in, the PI should follow the directions to complete the information requested on the My Profile page and upload their current CV (10-page limit). The My Profile page is the PI's online account with the Spencer Foundation whether they are applying for a grant, reviewing a proposal, or submitting a grantee report.

Note: Any Co-PIs must also register and complete their profile information if they wish

to be included on the application.

Intent to Apply Form

To fill out the Intent to Apply form, the PI should go to Workbench and click the Apply button for the Vision Grants program. The draft form can be saved and returned to a later time if necessary. The draft form will be available on the PI's Draft Proposals list on their Workbench.

Intent to Apply Form Elements

Below is an overview of the application elements that the PI will be expected to complete. This information is not binding but it is helpful in determining the appropriate reviewers for your eventual full proposal and for internal evaluations of our grant programs.

- **Project Personnel** - As the person creating the draft application, the PI will automatically be assigned to the proposal as the Principal Investigator. For any Co-PIs on the proposal, the PI will be asked to provide their names and organizations in this section.
- **Proposal Summary** – Information about the proposal is requested, such as the project title, estimated duration, the central topic(s), and a 200-word project summary.
- **Project Data** – Within the online application, we ask the PI to check off the appropriate options for the proposed Vision Grant in the following categories: disciplinary perspective, topics, geographical scope, and contexts.
- **Submit the Intent to Apply Form** - Once the PI has completed the form, they should click the Submit button at the bottom of the page. The Full Proposal application form will now be available on their Workbench.

Reminder: The Intent to Apply form must be submitted by noon central time on the due date in order to submit a Full Proposal for the upcoming review cycle.

Step 2: Prepare and Submit a Full Proposal

As a reminder, Vision Grants are \$75,000 for a duration of between 6 and 12 months. Vision Grants are intended to provide research planning grant support to teams of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and/or community members to develop thoughtful and rigorous studies and programs of research. Proposal elements are further specified below.

Like the Intent to Apply form, the Vision Grants proposals must be submitted through

an online application form following the guidelines below.

The person filling out the application should go to “Draft Proposals” on their Workbench and click Vision Grants in draft status. The draft application can be saved and returned to as necessary before the deadline. Saved draft applications are located in the Draft Proposals list on the Workbench.

Vision Grant Proposal Elements

Below are the elements that Vision Grants teams are expected to submit.

- **Project Personnel:** This section will automatically populate from the submitted Intent to Apply form. Teams can edit the text that appears in this section if they choose.
- **Proposal Summary:** This section will also automatically populate from the submitted Intent to Apply form. Teams can also edit the text that appears in this section if they choose.
- **Proposal Narrative (2000 words):** The Vision Grant program is intended to provide support in planning and developing a study or program of work that is designed to transform education systems toward equity. However, since this is a planning grant, we do not expect that the full research project will already be planned out in the proposal. Thus, our focus will be on evaluating the promise of the project that will be developed, and its potential for transformative change for equity in education. The proposal narrative should include the following (uploaded as a PDF):
 - *A description of the particular challenge or opportunity this research project seeks to address and its potential to be transformative.* Include the following: What is innovative about the focus of the project? How will the team know it is important to the field and to stakeholders? What have been prior constraints in this area or how will this project move beyond prior efforts to disrupt inequities or advance equity? Does the scope and scale of the project lend itself to transformative systems change, and are there sightlines to that transformation? Describe how this project has the potential to result in transformative change to education systems, and initial thoughts about *how* that transformation will be advanced
 - *An empirical rationale for the potential project.* Although we anticipate that the empirical rationale may evolve over the course of the planning grant, we are interested in the project team's initial identification of relevant literatures, findings, gaps, and opportunities. We encourage the team to seek out a range of lenses and empirical bodies of work, and to explore across disciplines for empirical studies, conceptual frameworks, and theories that will initially guide the transformative research project design.
 - *A description of the team.* Conducting transformative research requires the engagement of a diverse set of expertise – methodological, disciplinary,

and experiential. We anticipate that teams will engage scholars across departmental and school affiliation, and will include multiple stakeholders across systems levels or sectors. Proposals should include descriptions of key leadership and team members and their expected contributions to the project. This includes a description of the expertise (conceptual, empirical, methodological, praxis/professional) that is represented on the team, and how the team is poised through this proposed research planning grant to further develop or draw on diverse conceptual and methodological approaches, as well as practice and policy-based experiences. This should include a description of researchers and other stakeholders (students, families, educators, site/system leaders, policy experts, others).

- *A process for collaborative work on developing the research design.* This includes an overview of the processes the team will use to engage in collective thinking and planning of the research project/program of work. It also includes the potential methodological approaches the team is planning to pursue and how the team will build upon the existing expertise of the team to develop new knowledge along the way. A key aspect of the process should be focused on how multiple stakeholders will engage in the research design to ensure deep collaboration and impact. For example, how will the team develop relationships across stakeholder groups and how will all team members be included in project development, routine practices, and project governance and structures as part of this planning grant?

The text should be double-spaced and in 12-point font. APA style is preferred. At the conclusion of the narrative, please include the word count in parentheses. The reference list should follow the narrative in the same PDF file and will not count toward the 2000 word limit.

Note: Tables and other figures can be included in the text of the proposal, where appropriate, provided they are used sparingly. The text contained in any tables and figures will not count toward the word limit. However, it is important that any tables or figures in the narrative portion of the proposal are explained or described.

Project Timeline

A project timeline should be uploaded as a PDF file and should indicate the proposed start and end dates of the project, as well as key project events and milestones. The project timeline may not exceed 1 page, and the text should not be smaller than 9-point font. The proposed project duration can be up to 12 months.

Budget and Budget Justification

The budget form is divided into the following categories and each category has a pulldown menu of the line item choices listed in parentheses below:

- Salaries (PI, Co-PI, Postdoctoral Research Assistant, Graduate Student,

Researcher, Undergraduate Researcher, Other Research Staff, Other Staff, Supplemental PI Course Release, Supplemental Co-PI Course Release)

- Benefits (PI Benefits, Co-PI Benefits, Researcher Benefits, Other Staff Benefits, Tuition/Fees, Supplemental Course Release Benefits)
- Other Collaborator (Independent Consultant, Advisor)
- Travel (Project Travel, Conference or Dissemination Travel)
- Equipment and Software (Equipment, Software)
- Project Expenses (Supplies, Participant Stipends/Costs, Communication, Transcription)
- Learning and Professional Development (Trainings) [NOTE: Please put any costs associated with this line item under “Other” in the budget template. For any Learning and Professional Development costs that you list, please make it clear in your justification that the costs are associated with this particular line item.]
- Other (If you have other costs not associated with the line items above, detail them in this category.)

Each expense for the project should be added and the budget narrative field should be completed, providing a description of that specific expense. Detailed guidelines are available within the application form.

Subcontracts: If the proposed Vision Grant will have a subcontract(s), a separate subcontract budget form will need to be completed for each subcontract involved. The subcontract form has the same categories and line item choices listed above.

Optional Appendix: Innovative Approaches to Equity in Research

We recognize that scholars and scholarship have continued to develop innovative approaches to conducting research in ethical and just ways. If you so choose, you are invited to upload a one-page appendix in your Vision Grant proposal to elaborate on the theoretical, methodological, and partnership structures, or other dimensions you deem as relevant to conducting ethical and just research. For example, if your work engages youth, families, or community-based organizations, you may want to elaborate on how traditional power dynamics will be addressed. Or, if your work engages with Indigenous communities, you may want to elaborate on the project leadership’s histories and engagement with Indigenous communities, any formal agreements (e.g., Tribal IRB or approvals), or the use of Indigenous methodologies in the project. Or perhaps you are working on new quantitative measures or modeling approaches that would benefit from further explanation. We anticipate and welcome a wide range of other possibilities.

Project Data

Within the online application, we ask you to choose the appropriate options with regard to your project in the following categories: disciplinary perspective, topics, geographical scope, and contexts. This information is helpful in determining the appropriate reviewers for your proposal and for internal evaluations of our grant

programs.

Signature from Authorized Representative of the Administering Organization

This section of the application details the steps necessary to obtain the authorized signature for the proposal through the Adobe E-sign process. The PI is required to provide the Signatory's name, title, and email address; this is normally an administrative or financial person who has the authority to sign the proposal on behalf of the organization. Note: The signature process must be completed by noon on the deadline date. The applicant is responsible for making sure that the proposal is signed by the deadline. To do so, we recommend filling in the online application at least a week ahead of the deadline date. The Spencer Foundation is unable to accept late submissions.

Submit

Once all of the elements listed above are completed, click the Submit button at the bottom of the application page and it will be routed to the identified Signatory for signature and final submission.

Questions

Please email visiongrants@spencer.org with any questions.

Review Process & Criteria for Decisions

Proposals submitted to the Vision Grants program are peer reviewed by a select panel and Foundation staff. The review panel for this program is made up of scholars in the field of education research with expertise across many disciplines and methodological areas, as well as practitioners and/or policy experts. Panelists are asked to rate and comment on the following:

Significance of the Focal Issues

Reviewers will evaluate the significance of the proposed issues and their transformative potential in educational systems. This will include the description of how the research described in the proposal is situated in relation to prior research, theory, and practice/policy, and the knowledge-building potential of the area being pursued. We are looking for innovative ideas that the research planning grant will allow teams the time and space to develop into ambitious and forward-looking research projects to transform our educational system toward greater equity.

Articulation of Collaborative Research Processes and Structures

Reviewers will evaluate the processes and plans for developing a rigorous and collaborative research project toward transformative education. At the heart of

systems transformation in education must be evidence-based approaches to developing new practices, processes, policies, and structures. Thus, reviewers will evaluate both the potential for rigorous research, and the structures for equitable collaboration (including how power will be shared across team members).

Rationale for Expertise of Team to Develop Research Project

Reviewers will evaluate the disciplinary and methodological diversity and collaborative potential of people involved in the project. This means that reviewers will be looking for team members from different schools, departments, and disciplinary approaches, and/or team members that use significantly different research methodologies; inside or outside of universities. Reviewers will also evaluate the appropriateness and strength of the collaboration with practice, policy, and/or community. Reviewers will be looking for not just whether the expertise required is represented but how the individuals and collective will continue to stretch, grow, and develop new understandings together as part of this planning process.

Opportunity for Transformation

Reviewers will evaluate the extent to which the topic of the project, the scope and scale of the view for systemic change, and the approach is likely to result in transformation toward making education and learning systems, practices, and policies more equitable. Reviewers will be looking for initial evidence that the teams understand why the particular problem or opportunity is significant to stakeholders and how they will continue to strengthen this evidence through the research planning grant. The reviewers will also be looking for how the team will be working toward not just what is plausible but what is possible as we envision new and more equitable educational systems to meet the needs of students, staff, and communities. Proposals should have clear sightlines to systems transformation and an initial plan for how the evidence ultimately gathered in the research project will lead to impact.

Budget and Timeline

Reviewers will evaluate the adequacy of the budget and timeline, as well as the alignment among budgetary allocations, proposed collaborations, and development of ideas.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can a PI or co-PI be eligible for a Vision Grant if they already have another active Spencer grant?

A: Yes. PIs and/or Co-PIs may be involved with another Spencer funded grant or proposal as PI and/or Co-PI, in addition to being named as a PI and/or Co-PI on a Vision Grant proposal.

Q: How large should Vision Grant teams be? Who should be represented on teams?

A: Project teams should decide on the scope and scale of their Vision Grant teams given the research project being developed. We expect that most teams will be somewhere between 4 and 10 people. For more information, please consult the Vision Grants Request for Proposals document. We do expect teams to be interdisciplinary and/or multi-method. We also expect collaborations with practitioners, policymakers, young people, educators, non-profit organizations, governments, or communities (this list is not exhaustive—these are only examples).

Q: What are typical budget line items for a Vision Grant project?

A: Please consult the Vision Grants Request for Proposals document where we provide details about the budget, including budget categories.

Q: Are indirect costs allowed for Vision Grants?

A: No. The Spencer Foundation does not allow indirect costs for budgets that are \$75,000 or less. Please see the Applicant Information and Policies section of the website for additional information: <https://www.spencer.org/resources/Applicant-Information-and-Policies>

Q: How are Vision Grants different from a research project that could be submitted to other Spencer grant programs?

A: Vision Grants are planning grants. They are designed to provide project teams with the time, space, resources, and scaffolding to *plan* a large-scale study or program of research. Different from Spencer's other research funding programs, the proposal does not yet need to be a fully fleshed out research plan. Proposals identify a topic or focus with the potential for transformative impact, as well as a process and a team that will lead to a fully fleshed out research plan by the end of the grant period.

Q: How is the Vision Grants program different from Spencer's Research-Practice Partnership grant program?

A: The scale and scope of Vision Grants is different from those that would be appropriate for the Research-Practice Partnerships Program. We expect Vision Grant teams to be working toward transforming educational systems for equity; equity-oriented systems change is the goal. Research-Practice Partnerships also involve collaboration, but need not be as focused on systems change outcomes.

Additionally, Vision Grants are *planning grants*, and the program is designed to create

and nurture strong and impactful collaborations with a variety of stakeholders across institutions, disciplines, methodological traditions, policy, practice, etc., and then imagine and design an innovative research project(s)/program of research. This is unlike Spencer's Research-Practice Partnership grant program where we fund partnerships that have a history of working together and are to conduct a specified set of research activities related to the partnership that they will accomplish during the course of the grant.

Q: Can Vision Grant proposals include time and resources for developing partnerships/ relationships/community between researchers, practitioners, policy advocates, etc.?

A: Yes. We expect that Vision Grant proposal budgets will include time and resources for the development of partnerships and relationships. Please see the Vision Grant Request for Proposals document for additional information.

Q: How broadly should we think about education systems being targeted for change? How is Spencer envisioning "large scale transformation"? Are there particular topics or issues that Spencer is interested in for the Vision Grant?

A: Vision Grants are field initiated like Spencer's other grant programs, meaning that we do not dictate particular topics or issues that we want Vision Grant teams to address. Vision Grant teams have complete freedom to propose planning grants about critically important topics and issues situated in systems that need to be transformed for equity. Please see the Vision Grants Request for Proposals document for a few example project ideas to help concretize what we mean by systems transformation (and please keep in mind that these are only examples).

Q: How long are Vision Grant awardees eligible to apply for the Transformative Research Grant?

A: Vision Grant grantees are eligible to apply for a Transformative Research Grant for up to two years after their Vision Grant is first funded.

Q: How many Vision Grant proposals will be awarded each cycle?

A: We expect to award 10 Vision Grants during each cycle of the program. There will be two cycles per year.

Q: Do PIs have to be located in a university to be eligible?

A: No, PIs and/or Co-PIs do not need to be located in a university to be eligible for a

Vision Grant. As we note in the RFP: Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs applying for a Vision Grant must have appropriate experience or an earned doctorate in an academic discipline or terminal degree in a professional field. While graduate students may be part of the research team, they may not be named the PI or Co-PI on the proposal. The PI must be affiliated with a non-profit organization or public/governmental institution that is willing to serve as the administering organization if the grant is awarded. The Spencer Foundation does not award grants directly to individuals.

Q: Are resubmissions allowed?

A: Yes. Like Spencer's other grant programs, we accept resubmissions of Vision Grants.

Deadlines

Applications Open

mid-June, 2023

Intent to Apply Form Deadline

August 15, 2023 (12 noon CDT)

Full Proposal Deadline

September 14, 2023 (12 noon CDT)
